

Carpal tunnel surgery

**Information after your carpal
tunnel release operation**



Operation date:

Operation side:

Who is this leaflet for?

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs due to pressure on a nerve in your wrist. It can cause numbness and a tingling sensation in the thumb, index and middle fingers, pain, a feeling of clumsiness in the hand and night symptoms. This is initially treated with splintage, therapy and a steroid injection. If symptoms recur or persist, an operation is performed under local anaesthesia to relieve pressure on the nerve.

Pain relief

Keep your hand raised for the first 2 to 3 days to reduce swelling. Take regular **Paracetamol** for the first 3 days after the operation, even if you don't feel any pain. You should take two 500mg tablets, four times per day, unless told otherwise. Take an alternative pain killer as advised by your GP or pharmacist if you are allergic to Paracetamol.

Dressings and wound care

Your hand will be bandaged. Underneath the bandages, there will be a small sticky plaster dressing.

Take off the **bandage 5 days after** the operation, but **keep the small sticky plaster dressing on** for 14 days. Keep the small sticky dressing clean and dry, it is splash-proof but it is not water-proof. A spare dressing is generally provided on the day of surgery in the eventuality that the dressing accidentally comes off.

The stitches used might be absorbable or non-absorbable. Absorbable stitches will fall out on their own. If we use non-absorbable stitches, you will need to book an appointment and visit your **GP Practice 14 days after your operation** so that the nurse can remove the stitches and check the wound. At this stage, the wound would have healed and you can **wash** your hands with soap and water as normal.

Scar massage therapy

This is something you can do to help your skin recover after an operation. You can start two days after the stitches are removed and the scab has fallen off leaving a scar and intact skin. Put a small amount of **moisturiser on the scar**. To massage the skin, use the tip of one finger or thumb to push down firmly on the scar until the skin blanches slightly, making small circular movements. Repeat this action along the length of the scar. Also massage the skin two finger-widths past the edge of the scar. Do this for **5 minutes, 3 times a day, for 3 months**. We recommend this because the scar can become very sensitive if it is not touched.

Activities

Keep your fingers active after the surgery. Do this regularly, starting straight away within limits of comfort. Do the **exercises described on the next pages** on the day of your operation and regularly after that. You should do them 10 times every hour so that you can get back to moving your fingers in the same way you did before the operation. It is important that you remember to do these exercises because you will not have appointments with a physiotherapist unless there are problems.

You should be able to move your wrist normally when the bandages are reduced, 5 days after surgery. You can use your hand for light day-to-day activities, but **do not lift anything heavier than 1kg** until after the stitches are taken out. 1kg is the same as a large, two-pound bag of sugar. Avoid heavy lifting, activities that make you strain and repetitive work for 4 to 6 weeks.

When you can return to work will depend on the activities your job involves. You should be able to return to an office based job within a few days but it can take several weeks, even up to 3 months, for your wrist to be strong enough for heavy manual work. If you require a sick note, this will be provided on the day of your operation taking into consideration your daily and work activities.

You should avoid **driving** until after the stitches have been taken out. Make sure that you can hold the steering wheel with a strong grip and that you can safely make an emergency stop.

Any concerns

If you are worried, contact your **GP Practice**. They or you can then contact the Upper Limb Team on **01865 737874** to organise a follow-up appointment in clinic. Your GP can also contact the On-Call Registrar at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre or Plastic Surgery Registrar at the John Radcliffe Hospital depending on where your operation was performed. You should contact your GP and ask for an emergency review if:

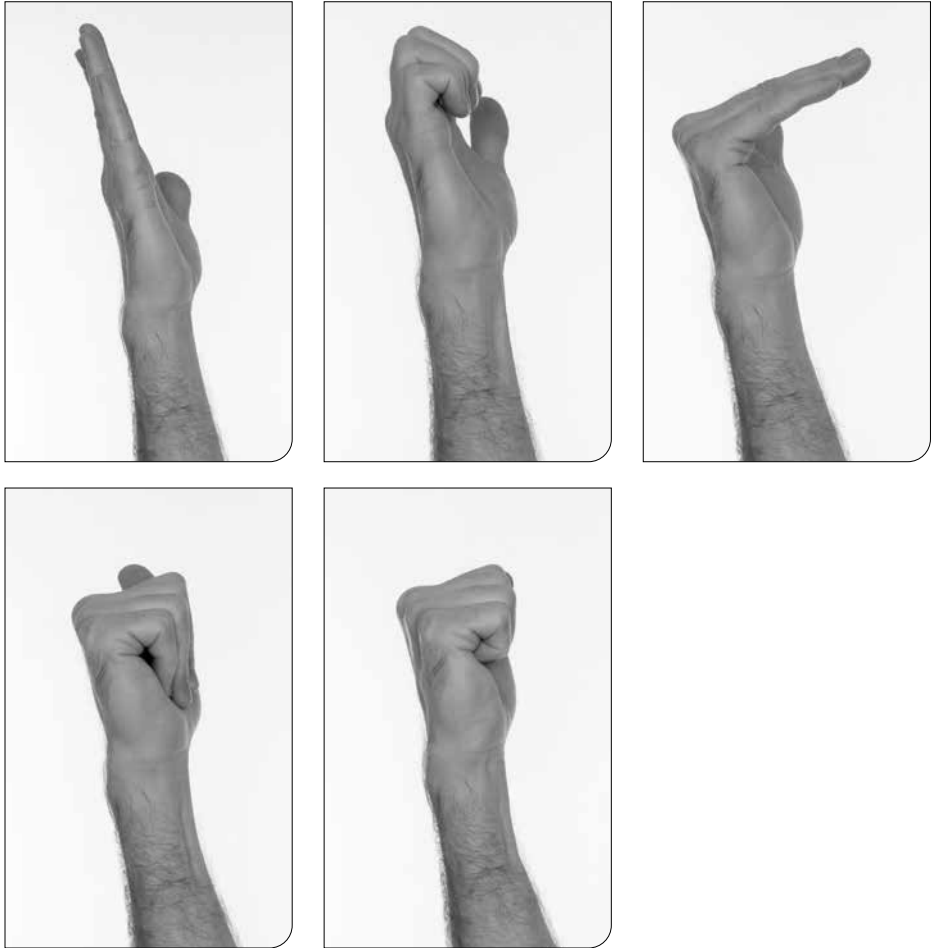
- Your hand becomes swollen, hot, red, more painful or numb
- There is a bad smell or blood stained discharge from the wound, or if the wound opens up
- You develop a fever with redness around the wound or dressing, or develop a rash
- You cannot make a full fist with all your fingers or if your fingers are still as stiff after three weeks as they were after surgery
- Swelling around the wound does not improve by six weeks or swelling gets worse
- The scar is still sensitive to touch six weeks after surgery.

Exercises

Finger movement exercise

- Go through the sequence of finger positions shown in Figure 1: straight, hook, duck, straight fist and full fist

Figure 1



Fingertip exercise

- Curl your fingers so that the tip of the thumb can touch the tip of the index finger, also known as the first finger or pointer finger.
- Slide the tip of the thumb across the tip of each finger in turn. Start with the index finger and finish with the little finger.
- Finally, slide the tip of your thumb down your little finger to the junction of the base of the finger with the palm. You will need to bend your thumb to do this.

Figure 2.



Contact us

Upper Limb Team

Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, Windmill Road, Headington OX3 7LD.

Telephone number: **01865 737874**

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

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